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Periodization and the political: Abdallah Laroui's analysis of temporalities in a postcolonial context

Nils Riecken, ZMO

Abstract

This paper challenges the common opposition between periodizations as a heuristic means for historians, on the one hand, and as a political element in narratives of groups and origins on the other. It conceives periodizations as elements within wider social uses of time and, thus, the symbolic production of the political. I demonstrate this by analysing the works of the Moroccan historian and intellectual Abdallah Laroui (*1933) on modernity, historical representation, time and difference. First, I look at how Laroui spells out the relation of particular and general periodizations. Then I compare his approach to Dipesh Chakrabarty's in his book *Provincializing Europe*. I interpret their discussion of time and temporalities as a response to a general problem in the theory of history, as well as an expression of a certain way of experiencing a globalised modernity in (post)colonial contexts. I argue that the core of their critique is the challenging of hegemonic representations of time and the breaking up of unified time into multiple temporalities. Finally, I look closer at the various articulations of this *Denkfigur* (figure of thought), especially regarding the postcolonial context and Walter Benjamin's notion of empty, homogenous time.

Introduction¹

In this text, I argue that one way to examine the political dimension of periodizations is to look at how time is socially produced and how it thus enables certain views of the past, the present and the future. This means asking about how a certain periodization creates a place in the present in relation to a certain past.² I will analyse this political dimension of time and periodizations with regard to the works on the history and the theory of historiography by Moroccan historian, intellectual and novelist Abdallah Laroui (*1933). Laroui's works, I argue, provide an analysis of social uses of time and different temporalities as well as an argument about the political dimension of periodizations. I will compare Laroui's perspective with Dipesh Chakrabarty's approach in his book *Provincializing Europe*.³ Both advance arguments about periodization, time and the political that interpret time as something historical rather than given,

¹ I wish to thank Bettina Gräf, Ulrike Freitag and Kai Kresse very much for their comments on an earlier draft version that helped improving the text considerably. I would also like to thank Chris Reid and Mary Beth Wilson for their help with the language editing. An earlier version was presented at the International Graduate Conference 2011 »Colonial Legacies, Postcolonial Contestations: Decolonizing the Social Sciences and the Humanities« at Goethe-University Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, June 16-18, 2011, at the panel »Postcolonial Thought and the Problem of Periodization« organized by Felix Schürmann. The article is based on my dissertation research that is funded by the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, Freie Universität Berlin.

² »Une société se donne ainsi un présent grâce à une écriture historique.« Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002). 141.

³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).

and they analyse it as an effect of social practices. By looking at how these authors analyse representations of time, I want to show how the practice of periodizing carries with it the larger problematic concerning social time and the political. Moreover, their analyses not only problematize uses of time in general, but also represent particular perspectives on time within the postcolonial contexts of Morocco, India and beyond.⁴

I thus contend that the historians' practice is permeated and shaped by the logics theorists of history write about. Historiography and the theory of history are genres that sometimes seem to have little in common. I claim, however, that despite their apparently different tasks, they nonetheless have overlapping concerns. Historical texts can be analysed with regard to their tacit presuppositions and the kinds of discursive rules they follow in their temporal context. My focus here will be on time as the shared problem of historiography and the theory of history.

Two functions are usually ascribed to periodizations, which are often put in opposition to each other. On the one hand, periodizations are considered a heuristic means for historians, while, on the other, they are viewed as a political element in the narratives of and about groups of people. Many historians today would state that they use periodizations with regard to their particular research questions and that they are not themselves inscribed in the past. They would also insist that they are based on historical reflexion and thus relative.⁵ From the latter perspective, periodizations appear to be quite a neutral element in the historian's tool box. From the former perspective, they are seen as political elements of the collective memory which allow groups to narrate their origins and thereby define themselves in the present. As elements of origin narratives, they are seen as political or politicized elements of self-understanding instead of a disinterested, methodological means for critically analysing a historical topic.⁶

4 'Abdallāh Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ. Al-ḡuz al-auwwal. Al-alfāz wa-l-maḏāhib* [The Concept of History, Vol. 1: Expressions and Schools], *Al-ḡuz al-tānī. Al-mafāhīm wa-l-uṣūl* [Vol. 2: Concepts and Methods] (Beirut and Casablanca: Al-markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 1997). 'Abdallāh Al-'Arwī, *Taqāṭunā fī ḍaw' al-tārīḥ* [Our Culture in the Light of History], 6th ed. (Casablanca and Beirut: Al-markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 2002). Abdallah Laroui, *Islam et histoire. Essai d'épistémologie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

5 E.g. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2010). 84, 88, 93.

6 The separation of these two functions – heuristic vs. political – is emphasized in Renate Dürr, Gisela Engel, and Johannes Süßmann, »Einleitung«, in *Eigene und fremde Frühe Neuzeiten. Genese und Geltung eines Epochenbegriffs* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2003), 1-3. I wish to thank Torsten Wollina for pointing out this text to me.

As I will show, however, periodizations can have political implications in both cases. Whether they concern historical turning points and new steps or continuities, assertions can be political.⁷ This is because they are based on a specific determination of what should be considered in such a context as real. The term political is not understood here according to the common distinction of neutral/disinterested versus politicized/ideological speech. Instead, it is a dimension of discursive and non-discursive practices in which the real – the past, the present, humans as actors, their relations etc. – is defined. In these practices, the limits of the utterable and the doable are both produced and become objects of contention.⁸ The real, and thus views of time and history, are therefore continuously constructed, often in conflicting ways within and according to certain institutional contexts and disciplinary and discursive rules.⁹

7 On the relation of political and periodization regarding the imagination of modernity: Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty. How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

8 Such a perspective of a history of knowledge is developed, for instance, in: Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, »Introduction. Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule«, *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 612. Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969); Michel Foucault, *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); Michel Foucault, »Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault – October 25th, 1982« in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock, 1988); Achim Landwehr, »Diskurs – Macht – Wissen. Perspektiven einer Kulturgeschichte des Politischen«, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 85 (2003); Philipp Sarasin, »Geschichtswissenschaft und Diskursanalyse«, in *Geschichtswissenschaft und Diskursanalyse*, ed. Philipp Sarasin (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003); Joseph Vogl, »Einleitung«, in *Poetologien des Wissens um 1800*, ed. Joseph Vogl (München: Fink, 1999). Armin Nassehi, *Die Zeit der Gesellschaft. Auf dem Weg zu einer soziologischen Theorie der Zeit*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2003). Taking up the definition of the collaborative research centre 584 »The Political as Communicative Space in History«, <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/en/geschichte/forschung/sfb584/research_program/index.html>, accessed: 23.11.2008, I consider practices, discourses and definitions of borders as political »when they transcend individuals in effectiveness and work on an extensive basis«, »are not ephemeral, but permanent« and »aim at obligation«. This involves »the possibilities and limits of things that can be said and done« as well as »relationships of the agents, in which the rules of living together are negotiated or changed«.

9 This position might be called constructivist, but that does not imply refraining from asking about contexts, material conditions or processes of institutionalization. Heinz von Foerster, Albert Müller, and Karl H. Müller, »Im Goldenen Hecht. Über Konstruktivismus und Geschichte. Ein Gespräch«, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 8, no. 1 (1997). But see David Feest, »Repräsentationen und Konstruktionen: Wie viel Erkenntnistheorie braucht die Geschichtswissenschaft?«, in *Arbeit an der Geschichte. Wie viel Theorie braucht die Geschichtswissenschaft?*, ed. Jörg Baberowski (Frankfurt a.M./New York: Campus, 2009). On

Time is not simply given then, but needs to be considered an effect of human activities. It is a historical and social fact (Paul Rabinow),¹⁰ a »social institution« and »communicative symbol« (Norbert Elias).¹¹ By stressing the communicative context in which time is represented, one focuses on how time is practiced rather than on the question of what time might be. Norbert Elias has pointed out that the common tendency to speak about time as a substantive makes one imagine time as something given, as an intrinsic part of nature.¹² In contrast, he argues that time is socially produced and has to be analysed as such. It is a »frame of reference« that serves human groups to establish certain »milestones« in their history as a »continuum of changes« or to compare a period in this continuum of changes with other periods.¹³ It can be understood as »a symbol of a relationship that a human group of beings biologically endowed with the capacity for memory and synthesis, establishes between two or more continua of changes, one of which is used by it as a frame of reference or standard of measurement for the other or others«.¹⁴

This issue of social uses of time goes beyond the texts of academic historians. If one considers the various contemporary descriptions of the present, which use such terms as modernity and modernization, post-modernity (as the period after modernity), late capitalism, the age of acceleration, globalization or presentism,¹⁵ it becomes obvious that these conceptualizations of time are significant speech acts that attempt to define the pre-

sent. The latter is often periodized in two different ways: either as a moving point in time or as a wider time-space that leads up to the now after a watershed, e.g. the end of World War II in 1945, the breakdown of the Eastern bloc in 1989 or the Arab Spring or Arab Revolutions in 2010, which changed the political landscape in the Mashreq and the Maghreb.¹⁶ Such attempts to describe the present are also part of wider struggles over representation¹⁷ in which the very definition of the real is at stake: What is »our« world? What is »contemporary«? And, what is structuring the »now«?¹⁸ To claim what is contemporary and what is not is to make a periodization. This, in turn, touches on the political because it defines the real from a certain temporal perspective.

Putting periodizations in the wider context of uses of time undermines the neat distinction between heuristic and political uses of periodizations. It does not, however, simply disregard the concern that this distinction implies, namely, distinguishing between more and less adequate descriptions of the past and the present. To be sure, not all historians' periodizations are hopelessly ideological or need to be debunked as factually false. On the contrary, I think they have to be taken seriously (which is to say not for granted) as part of a wider social practice of representing time and the social. As Fredric Jameson has noted, one »cannot not periodize«.¹⁹

How are periodizations related to representations of time? Periodizations delimit a stretch of time with a beginning and an end. They are used to situate a historical event, object, person, process, etc. within it. By marking beginnings and ends, discrete events and periods, they involve views of the old and the new, the singular and the recurrent, continuity and discontinuity and structures of repetition (Reinhart Koselleck), that is, different

this wider debate see e.g. Perez Zagorin, »History, the Referent, and Narrative: Reflections on Postmodernism Now«, *History and Theory* 38, no. 1 (1999); Keith Jenkins, »A Post-modern Reply to Perez Zagorin«, *History and Theory* 39, no. 2 (2000).

10 Paul Rabinow, »Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology«, in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

11 Norbert Elias, *Über die Zeit. Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie II. Translated from the English by Holger Fliessbach und Michael Schröter*. 3rd ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988). XXI, XLV. Émile Durkheim considered time as a social institution as well: Nassehi, *Die Zeit der Gesellschaft*: 111.

12 Elias, *Über die Zeit*: X-XI on the conceptualization of time either as part of creation or as the result of an a priori synthesis.

13 Ibid., 43.

14 Norbert Elias, *Time: An Essay* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). 46.

15 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, »Modern, Modernität, Moderne«, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Vol. 4, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978). Cornelia Klinger, »Modern, Moderne, Modernismus«, in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*. Vol. 4 (2002). Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Geschichte der Globalisierung. Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen*, 2nd revised ed. (München: C. H. Beck, 2004). Esp. 7-15, 108-13. Hartmut Rosa, *Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005). François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003).

16 The German term *Zeitgeschichte* (contemporary history), whose beginning is mostly marked by the end of World War II in 1945, also implies the notion of such an extended present.

17 Roger Chartier, »Le monde comme représentation«, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 44, no. 6 (1989): 1514. Roger Chartier, »Writing the Practices«, *French Historical Studies* 21, no. 2 (1998): 262. In both texts he stresses that representations should be understood as material practices that are shaped both by discursive and non-discursive dimensions. Symbolic representations are thus located in political processes – and not on a merely ideational level – in which the social structure, as such, and its hierarchization is the matter that is debated. It thus comprises both »Darstellung« and »Vertretung« – to supply a description and to stand in for something or someone.

18 Cf. Judith Butler, »Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time«, *The British Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 1 (2008): esp. 2, 6-8, 20-21. On the potentially exclusionary effect of such a claim: Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 87.

19 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity. Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002). 29.

rhythms or patterns of change and repetition.²⁰ All these terms and distinctions rely on certain temporal premises based on their particular use. For instance, one can always ask: How new is the new and against which measure? Such a question is highly relevant in debates on modernism and post-modernism from a global perspective, as well as in postcolonial debates.²¹ To judge an event as new or, on the contrary, as a repetition of something older presupposes an evaluative framework.

From this perspective, the issue of periodization raises fundamental and widely debated questions about historical representation: how to conceive the relationship between discontinuities and continuities, event and process, part and whole; the relationship between the particular, the general and the universal; and how to grasp historical difference. The issue of periodization also gives rise to questions about the frames in which one writes the past and how these frames – whether national, transnational and global, qualitative and quantitative, secular and theological etc. – relate to certain temporalities. If one adopts this perspective on time as something that is socially produced, the use of time frames and the respective language to describe an event must also be considered to be situated in a communicative context. The same applies to representations of time in general, for instance, by a historian, a social scientist, a biologist or the same experts in other social roles. These representations of time emerge as parts of disciplinary practices that are engaged in defining the real. Yet the question remains as to how this multiplicity of times can be grasped. Are these different times linked to each other or do they exist side by side? Are they integrated in larger whole?²² Peter Osborne argues that it »is the idea of a competition or struggle between these different forms of temporalization within everyday life, which leads to the idea of a politics of time«.²³

20 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989). 130-31. Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*. Mit einem Beitrag von Hans-Georg Gadamer (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000). 12-14, 19-26.

21 Homi K. Bhabha, »How Newness enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation«, in *The Location of Culture*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). Susan Stanford Friedman, »Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies«, *Modernism/modernity* 13, no. 3 (2006).

22 These questions are not new. But they remain relevant because they are part of political struggles over historical representation. The question of how different temporalities and, thus, histories and memories, are linked to each other are part of the debates on the relation of nations, their homogeneity, immigration and multiculturalism.

23 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time. Modernity and Avant-garde* (London and New York: Verso, 1995). 117.

By historicizing time as a practice, Laroui and Chakrabarty together make an argument about what Osborne calls the politics of time. According to Laroui, new periodizations are a central means of questioning naturalized representations of time and history. The relativizing function of re-periodizations, however, is nothing new to historians. Indeed, periodizing – locating an event in a historical series – is a standard procedure and part of the historian's everyday work.²⁴ What Laroui and Chakrabarty argue for in fact goes beyond the call for re-periodizing. They rather plead for breaking apart views of a single time into discontinuous temporalities with a critique of hegemonic and unitary forms of time, as one encounters them, for example, in representations of Western modernity and Islam.

Their analyses of modern times belong to both a wider debate on historiography and a global history of modernity and the ways in which the latter has been experienced, theorized and appropriated. I read their analyses of temporalities on two levels and, thus, according to two distinct times. Briefly stated, their arguments seem to be, first, part of a general debate on the theory of history across borders and, second, responses to a particular intellectual and political situation, namely, the situation of post-independence Morocco (since 1956) and India (since 1947). On both levels, their discussion of time can be understood as a response to hegemonic views of time and history.

In my view, it is important to follow both perspectives for methodological reasons. If one follows the debates' systematic dimension or theoretical focus, they can be connected with each other, even if they were carried out separately. This enables a perspective that transcends one particular frame – European, Moroccan, Indian, Islamic etc. – and makes possible comparisons. However, by confining oneself to this vantage point, one runs the risk of treating theory as something timeless and detached from the given historical situation in which it emerged. In contrast, by taking into account Laroui's and Chakrabarty's particular locations one can investigate the specific intellectual and political situations in which certain texts and arguments were put forward. Yet if one does not, in turn, transcend this frame, it is difficult to see what their critiques have in common. In brief: Laroui and Chakrabarty write within contexts that can be seen as both different – i.e. with respect

24 See e.g. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester Manchester University Press, 2008). 91-92. »[...] we can never interpret a document except by inserting it into a chronological series or a synchronous whole.« Ibid., 92. From this perspective, one could also speak of historicization, that is, first and foremost, to situate an object in a historical sequence.

to the historical and political contexts of Morocco, France, India and the U.S. – and similar – i.e. as regards the interpretive frames of modernity, historiography, postcolonial discourse and the rethinking of the political.²⁵

I will now look at how Laroui discusses the relation between specific and general periodizations. The main concern here is how to articulate historical difference as a difference of times and periodizations. I will then focus on Laroui's view of modernity (*ḥadāṭa*), while comparing it to Chakrabarty's analysis of modernity from a postcolonial perspective, which he developed in his book *Provincializing Europe*.²⁶ Both authors view modernity as characterized by certain practices of time that have largely become globalized and also shape their own conditions of writing. The notion of historicism is key to their respective understandings of modernity. I will therefore look at how they make use of it and consider what this can tell us about the history of concepts from a translocal perspective. Thus, in the first step, I examine how Laroui and Chakrabarty recognize ways of handling time in contemporary societies that have become hegemonic.

In the next step, I will focus on a specific aspect of this debate, namely, the critiques of representations of time as empty and homogenous – the latter an expression coined by Walter Benjamin and taken up by several authors, especially in debates both on modernity and postcoloniality. By linking this debate to Laroui's analysis of multiple temporalities, I highlight the political dimension of how concepts such as modernity, postmodernity, Islam, or rationality are represented within a certain time and, moreover, how this political dimension has been connected in these debates to the act of challenging hegemonic forms of time. In this way, I connect Laroui's writings to the debates on postcolonialism. At the same time, I show that his argument deliberately goes beyond the framework of the postcolonial situation as a specific response to the latter by aspiring to achieve a universalist perspective.

Specific and general periodizations

As ways of counting time, periodizations mark our everyday lives. They also inform self-descriptions

in the humanities and the social sciences, where ›modern‹ is opposed to ›traditional‹, or those societies that are defined as non-Western and thus ›not yet modern‹.²⁷ For good reason, these definitions are generally criticized today for being Eurocentric. In such figures of thought (German: *Denkfigur*²⁸), one confronts the comparative dimension of time identified by Elias and which will figure prominently in the following discussion. Modern science frequently makes use of the binary code of old versus new:²⁹ one is used to speaking of outdated views versus new ones or more advanced approaches and analyses. This dual logic shapes the writing and publishing of texts, as well as the financing of projects. Modernity and modernism are themselves temporal concepts that stress the now, the possibility of radical novelty in a present allegedly untouched by traditions and the orientation towards an open future horizon.³⁰ Periodizations usually structure historical departments and thus the institutional setup and division of labour of academic historiography, e.g. antiquity, Middle Ages, early modern, modern and contemporary history.

Regarding Moroccan history after the advent of Islam, it is quite common to use periodizations according to dynasties (Almoravids, Almohads, Merinids, Wattasids, Saadis, 'Alawites).³¹ Likewi-

²⁷ »In social theory, the orient served as the ›other‹ to capitalist Europe.« David Ludden, »Orientalist Empiricism. Transformations of Colonial Knowledge«, in *Genealogies of Orientalism: History, Theory, Politics*, ed. David Prochaska and Edmund Burke III (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 93.

²⁸ I use this as a descriptive and relational term that is to draw attention to the fact that such representations have a spatial dimension and that this can tell something about the arguments explicitly or implicitly used in these representations. A good example is whether one understands traditions – like modernity or Islam – and social entities – like nations or groups – as having a number of set characteristics that can be seen as self-contained or whether one considers them forming part of a wider, continuing historical process. It is not by accident that the first version is much easier to put onto to paper – as a circle – and in a chart – as a number of characteristics – than the second one. In the latter, time breaks up the seeming clear-cut representation of a stable space.

²⁹ Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997). 968. Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*: 1132.

³⁰ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 244; Susan Stanford Friedman, »Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism«, *Modernism/modernity* 8, no. 3 (2001): 503-04; Heidrun Friesse, »Times, Histories and Discourse«, *Rethinking History* 14, no. 3 (2010): 409; Reinhart Koselleck, »›Erfahrungsraum‹ und ›Erwartungshorizont‹ – zwei historische Kategorien«, in *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989).

³¹ Michel Abitbol, *Histoire du Maroc* (Paris: Perrin, 2009). See also Raymond Jamous, »Royauté et tribus. Questions de périodisation et de répétition dans l'histoire du Maroc«, *Ateliers* 17 (1997).

²⁵ Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought. Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2010). 361, identifies the »radical rethinking of the political« as one of the »main themes of present Arab critical thought«.

²⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. For a comparison between Chakrabarty's and Harry Harootunian's approach to the history of modernity: Marco Gerbig-Fabel, »Eurozentrismus, Historismus und die ›Provinzialisierung‹ Europas. Zur Frage der epistemologischen Positionierung der Außereuropäischen Geschichte. Eine Miniatur«, *Historische Anthropologie. Kultur – Gesellschaft – Alltag* 13, no. 2 (2005).

se, the advent of Islam in the Maghreb is taken as a juncture that separates pre-Islamic from Islamic periods. Moreover, the tripartite periodization pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial time is also widely used.³² The tripartite periodization of antiquity, middle ages and modern history has travelled well beyond the confines of the Euro-American academy. At the same, its appropriateness for European and non-European regions has long been called into question.³³

In his study of the historiography on the Maghreb in 1977, Laroui critically questions periodizations based on »a geographical, dynastic or racial criterion«³⁴ which, for example, leads to »a sequence such as Punic, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, Arab, Turkish and French«. He similarly opposes the »sacrosanct«³⁵ tripartite division of antiquity, Middle Ages and modern times because of the mythical implications of any tripartite periodization.³⁶ He rejects the myth of »flowering and decadence«³⁷ which creates an impression of »fall and redemption«. He points out that non-Maghrebi historians have applied this tripartite periodization to Maghrebini history, albeit in a different way:³⁸ the Arab conquest of the seventh century was conceived as a substitute for the migration period, that is, the so-called Barbarian invasions. Both the Turkish conquest in the seventeenth century and the French expedition in the eighteenth century were alternatively interpreted as stand-ins for the Renaissance in Europe. He notes that such a periodization represents the Maghreb as a stage in which constructs like Occident and Orient, Christianity and Islam, Latin and Arabic clash with each other.³⁹

According to Laroui, Maghrebis also applied this tripartite periodization to the period of Islamization in the Maghreb. The first period was

identified as a classical era from the seventh until the fourteenth century. This period was, in turn, »subdivided into periods of preparation, apogee and decline«.⁴⁰ The second period was seen as a »long period of eclipse marked by defeats in Spain, foreign encroachments on the coasts, dislocation of the states and cultural lethargy«.⁴¹ The end of the nineteenth century was interpreted as »a cultural renewal«.⁴² This perception redeemed, in a way, the previous decline and »divert[ed] attention from the burdensome presence of the colonizers«, as Laroui remarks in regard to the political function of this periodization.

Laroui's periodizations of Maghrebini history have, accordingly, not followed the tripartite model. He structured his own book on the history of the Maghreb in terms of four epochs: the Maghreb under domination, the imperial Maghreb, institutional stagnation and the colonial Maghreb. In reference to the history of Islam in North Africa, he later advanced the following periodization with five epochs: pre-Islamic (first millennium BCE), Arabic (second to fifth century Hiġra/seventh to eleventh century BCE), Berber period (fifth to eighth century Hiġra/eleventh to fourteenth century BCE), Islam of the *zāwiyas* (ninth to tenth century Hiġra/fourteenth to fifteenth century BCE) and *Ṣalafi* Islam (second half of twelfth century Hiġra/eighteenth century BCE).⁴³

Laroui further reflects on the issue of periodization from a methodological perspective in his book *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ* (The Concept of History), first published in 1992. The book grew out of his didactic engagement with the training of history teachers in Morocco, as well as his book series on Western modern concepts and their translation in the Moroccan and Arab context.⁴⁴ This book

³² It is also seen (self-)critically: Edmund Burke III, »Theorizing the Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghrib«, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1998).

³³ Tarif Khalidi, »Reflections on Periodisation in Arabic Historiography«, *The Medieval History Journal* 1, no. 1 (1998): esp. 120-21. Lynn A. Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History*, Natalie Zemon Davis annual lecture series at Central European University, Budapest (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2008). 118.

³⁴ This and the following quote: Abdallah Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib. An Interpretive Essay. Transl. from the French by Ralph Manheim* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977). 11. See for this discussion in the French text: Abdallah Laroui, *L'histoire du Maghreb: un essai de synthèse*, 2nd ed., Textes à l'appui (Paris: Maspéro, 2001). 16-17. In the Arabic text: 'Abdallāh Al-'Arwī, *Muġmal tārīḥ al-Maġrib [History of the Maghreb. An Interpretive Essay]* (Casablanca and Beirut: Al-markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-'arabī, 2007). 36-37.

³⁵ Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib*.

³⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

³⁷ This and the following quote: ibid., 12.

³⁸ For the following: ibid., 11-12.

³⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² This and the following quote: ibid., See for a further contextualization of Laroui's periodization: Samira Mounir, »Laroui ou l'optimisme catastrophique«, *Lamaliz*, no. 45 (1971): 37-40.

⁴³ Abdallah Laroui, *Esquisses historiques* (Casablanca and Beirut: Centre Culturel Arabe, 2001). 19-45. Laroui uses here both forms of counting time and only refers once at the beginning to BCE as before Christ/Anno Domini. Laroui's own periodization Arab influences are given precedence to Amazigh populations (Berbers): The pre-Islamic period in Laroui's text includes Berber religiosity beside Phoenician-Punic influences, Romanization and Christianization. The Arabic period comprises conquest, Arabization and Islamization.

⁴⁴ 'Abdallāh Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ. Al-ġuz al-tānī. Al-mafāhīm wa-l-uṣūl* [The Concept of History. Vol. 2: Concepts and Methods] (Beirut and Casablanca: Al-markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-'arabī, 1997). 270-83. See also Abdallah Laroui, *Islam et modernité*, 3rd ed. (Casablanca and Beirut: Centre Culturel Arabe, 2009). 68-69, 91-92, 175. Laroui has given historical courses throughout his career. The training program for history teachers at secondary schools (*lycées, collèges*), in which he partook, had been organized by the National Ministry of Education. Abdallah Laroui, letter to the author, May 2010.

is mainly concerned with a historical epistemological analysis of the historian's practices against the background of old and new historiographies of modern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. While looking at these different historiographical traditions, Laroui asks what is universal in each of them with regard to their particular traditions. He thus raises questions about the relation of the particular to the universal and similarity to historical difference.

The author notes that while most scholars use the Christian time frame, few are really satisfied with it except those who study the history of Western Europe. Yet, most historians are not openly opposed to it.⁴⁵ Most non-Western historians, Laroui remarks, come to the conclusion that emptying the general Western periodization of any meaning specific to Western European history does not ultimately solve the problem of how to relate specific and general periodizations to each other. He discerns here a general problem, for although one needs general periodizations for professional, systematic and educational reasons, there will also never be an authoritative periodization that is universally accepted. He distinguishes this level from the level of exact periodizations of a time frame within particular geographical limits,⁴⁶ where one does not need an overall periodization.⁴⁷ The problem, he argues, does not lie with the co-existence of these two kinds of periodizations, nor is it the existence of generalizing periodizations as such. Rather, the problem relates to a time frame, whose tripartite structure is derived from the older practice of Christian historians and merged with specific periodizations (e.g. in the disciplines of economy, the arts), as well as national and collective ones (e.g. regarding states, civilizations). These periodizations, Laroui contends, cannot be integrated with each other.⁴⁸ Laroui argues that from a relational perspective inserting an event into a different time frame changes its meaning. If a certain nationally framed history were put into one single period, be it medieval or modern, it would acquire a different meaning than if it were put into a sequence marked by years, epochs, royal dynasties or religious dominance.⁴⁹ This leads Laroui to reject the scientific character of *general* periodizations. They can be used, he concludes, but should not be considered scientific.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ*. Vol 2.: 272.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 281.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 282.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 275, 278, 280-281.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 278. One may add: The slash between periodizations based on the Christian and the *Hiġra*-calendar seems to imply mathematical equivalence. But it is rather a relation of translation that is established between two different narrative spaces.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 278, fn. 1.

In this regard, Laroui cites the example of the Marxist periodization that historians in China, India, Egypt and Africa have used. Marxism aimed at a universal periodization of all societies, but was in fact locally situated in the nineteenth century. Moreover, it firmly relied on an opposition between West and East.⁵¹ Another example is Marshall Hodgson's attempt to re-periodize Islamic history in his book *Venture of Islam*.⁵² Laroui points out that Hodgson actually inserts Islamic history into Western history based on the Christian time frame. This has the effect of merely changing the meaning of the latter: the Early Middle Ages, conceived as a period of political disintegration and cultural and economic decline, becomes in Hodgson's account a time of improvement, flourishing and productivity that deserves to be called a classical era.⁵³ Generally, Laroui considers it almost impossible at the present stage and given the current state of research to develop an integrated periodization from a regional or national Arabic or Islamic perspective.⁵⁴

With regard to Hodgson's book, Laroui distinguishes two ways of conceiving of periods. One can use a certain period as an empty time-space and give every phase of it a certain connotation, e.g. decline, continuity, progress. From this perspective, Hārūn al-Rašīd (149 or 144-193 century *Hiġra*/766 or 763-809 A.C.) lived in the same time as Charles the Great (747/8-814 A.C.), even though he was not part of the same history.⁵⁵ Or, one can ascribe a certain connotation to a period. From this perspective, one could compare the Islamic *Naḥḍa* (usually translated as »Renaissance«) in the nineteenth century and the European Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, despite the fact that they are separated by four centuries.⁵⁶ Laroui notes that one faces a similar problematic in scholarly efforts to discern a distinct period that is la-

⁵¹ Ibid., 277.

⁵² Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. Vol. 1: *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁵³ Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ*. Vol 2.: 280-81. Thomas Bauer, »In Search of »Post-Classical Literature«: a review article (a review of: Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (eds.), *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*. Cambridge, 2006)«, *Mamlūk Studies Review* IX, no. 2 (2007): 137-46 critically on the use of terms classical, post-classical, and neo-classical in a European and Arabic context, especially when they designate long periods of time and imply narratives of decline and decadence.

⁵⁴ Laroui also critically refers to such a periodization advanced by the Committee for the History of Bilād al-Šām in Amman: Byzantian era, advent of Islam, Umayyad era, Abbasid era, Ottoman era and modern Arab history. Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ*. Vol 2.: 281.

⁵⁵ Laroui distinguishes here between the synchronous (*muzāmin*) and the contemporary (*mu'āšir*). Ibid., 280.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 280.

belled an era of reform (*işlāh*).⁵⁷ Other examples would be notions such as enlightenment or reformation and the question of non-European enlightenments and reformations. An argument is not being made here that is for or against one kind of periodizing or another. The aim is simply to make plain that periodizations entail representations of time and historical difference.

In order to analyse the relation between specific and general periodizations as well as the question of historical difference and comparability, I will now look at both Laroui's and Chakrabarty's analyses of modernity. I want to argue that they analyse the latter as a historical, temporal and, thus, periodizing category. In other words, I will observe how they observe time within a concrete historical context. Both authors have furthermore articulated their critique of modernity from a postcolonial position without, however, rejecting Western modernity. Although they draw on different archives and write from different locations, they work with similar *Denkfiguren*. Each seeks to move away from a one-dimension notion of time towards a perspective of multiple temporalities.

Laroui's and Chakrabarty's views of modern times and historicism

Laroui went to school in Morocco and studied in France. He studied under, among others, the philosopher and sociologist Raymond Aron (1905-1983) and the historian Charles Morazé (1913-2003) at the Institut d'Études Politiques (Science Po) and the Sorbonne in Paris. There, he became acquainted with social history as something that was not about »historical facts«, but »history as the development of social structures«.⁵⁸ He relates that he learned from Aron and Morazé to read Marx as a historian and social theoretician: »If I later took seriously the ideas of Karl Marx, it was because I was taught by two people who were not Marxists. Morazé and Aron took Marx as a historian, as a brilliant journalist, as a social theoretician but not as a political leader or a prophet. It seems to me that this is why I never was tempted to enter the communist party. I was always interested in Marx as an historian and a theoretician but not as a prophet.«⁵⁹

Laroui worked shortly in Egypt for the Moroccan Foreign Ministry as a cultural attaché and taught for four years at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1967 until 1971.⁶⁰ He has lived in Mo-

rocco ever since, teaching at the Mohamed V University in Rabat and educating history teachers.⁶¹ He is as well versed in the Euro-American as the Maghrebi and Mashreqi intellectual traditions, and reads and writes in both French and Arabic. He has published extensively in both languages, for instance, on Maghrebinian and Moroccan history, concepts like ideology (*īdīyūlūǧīya*), history (*tārīḥ*) and rationality (*ʿaql*) and the history and theory of historiography and is a well-known intellectual in Morocco, the Maghreb and the Mashreq. Jocelyne Dakhlia notes that, in France, Laroui is only known today to specialists of the Maghreb and the Arab region. She recalls that during the era of decolonization it was not unusual, however, for social scientists in France to be acquainted with Laroui's name, along with the Tunisian historian Hicham Djaït (*1935).⁶²

Chakrabarty speaks of Bengal and India as his archive.⁶³ Like Laroui, he comes from a society formerly colonized by European powers. Both had a multilingual education.⁶⁴ Chakrabarty studied in India and Australia and then moved to the U.S. He was member of the Subaltern Studies group and is considered one of the most prominent postcolonial historians. He has published extensively on Indian history, modernity, postcolonial theory as well as on the theory of history and historiography. He is mostly associated with the English tradition of postcolonial scholarship, while Laroui would be more readily seen as belonging to the French strand of critiques of colonialism.⁶⁵

Chakrabarty, however, does not seem to adopt the distinction between an English and a French postcolonial tradition. Rather, he points to Hicham Djaït and Frantz Fanon as being engaged in the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 282.

⁵⁸ Nancy Gallagher and Abdallah Laroui, »Interview - The Life and Times of Abdallah Laroui. A Moroccan Intellectual«, *The Journal of North African Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998): 135.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 135, 143-44. Abdallah Laroui, »Marx and the Intellectual From the Third World; or the Problem of Historical Retardation Once Again«. Translated by Nicolas Slater, *Diogenes* 16, no. 64 (1968): 128.

⁶⁰ Gallagher and Laroui, »Interview - The Life and Times of Abdallah Laroui«, 138-41.

⁶¹ Letter from the author, 20 May 2010.

⁶² Jocelyne Dakhlia, »La ›culture nébuleuse‹ ou l'islam à l'épreuve de la comparaison«, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 56, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 2001): 1177, 1179.

⁶³ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 3.

⁶⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, »Globalisation, Democratisation and the Evacuation of History?«, in *At Home in Diaspora. South Asian Scholars and the West*, ed. Jackie Assayag and Véronique Bénéï (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 133. Gallagher and Laroui, »Interview - The Life and Times of Abdallah Laroui«, 134. Abdallah Laroui, *Islamisme, modernisme, libéralisme. Esquisses critiques* (Casablanca: Centre Culturel Arabe, 2009), 218.

⁶⁵ Although the difference of their locations - Morocco and the U.S. - is relevant, I do not oppose Laroui's voice as more »authentic« to Chakrabarty's as being less so because he is located in the U.S. and thus in the diaspora outside his country of origin. Such a perspective seems to underlie critiques of postcolonial scholarship that is located in the U.S. It rests upon too a static notion of place and space, home, abroad and exile. For instance, Laroui is said to have chosen a self-exile in Morocco: Abdallah Malki, »Moroccan Academe and the Intellectual«, in *L'intellectuel et le pouvoir au XXIème siècle*, ed. Mohamed Bernoussi (Meknès: Université Moulay Ismail, Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, Meknès, 2008), 199.

very same question that for him characterizes all postcolonial scholarship, namely, the relation between the universal (e.g. ›the human‹, ›reason‹) and the particular.⁶⁶ The relation between the universal and the particular is also of central importance to Laroui's approach.⁶⁷

Despite their different institutional locations – in Laroui's case Morocco and in Chakrabarty's case the U.S. – their works are both marked by a certain displacement brought about by colonialism and a globalized modernity. Each stresses the global trajectory of liberalism and Marxism as an intellectual heritage of modernity, while considering Marxist perspectives analytic tools of the latter.⁶⁸ I view their approaches to modernity as elements in a global history of modernity in which this history has been experienced, translated and coped with in various ways. Thus my key interest lies in how their texts conceive their object, modernity, as a dominating element in the constitution of the real and in discerning what kind of strategies they advance in response.⁶⁹

Historicism figures prominently in both of their discussions of Western modernity, which they approach from a historical epistemological perspective. It remains to be clarified, however, whether they use the term historicism in the same sense. Does the observation that they use the same terminology – historicism, modernity – and have similar perspectives guarantee that they are addressing the same issue? Or do I impose this similarity with my own intervention and thus underestimate their particular contexts?

The same question could be raised regarding their use of the term postcolonial, which implies that both authors could be identified with a historical sequence, i.e. a temporal continuum. Laroui, though, usually does not appear in the postcolonial canon, nor does he refer explicitly to postcolonialism. For him, it is rather a periodization for the time after Morocco's independence in 1956. It is problematic to either solely stress the difference between individual postcolonial situations or treat the postcolonial as being simply one. Indeed, both approaches are possible, although each connotes

a different way of telling the story. By focusing on forms of argumentation and conceptual logics, one can escape a view that privileges either side of this distinction, thus leading to too narrow a focus that implies incomparability, or too abstract a view that subsumes historical and temporal differences to a timeless typology.

Both Laroui and Chakrabarty are attentive to the dialectic tension between the particular and the universal. This shapes their view of modernity as being located within history. Their texts treat universals as historically articulated in particular situations, while not necessarily limiting their validity to these particular situations. This consequently allows for a pragmatic and utilitarian view of modernity and its intellectual legacies. Laroui and Chakrabarty both develop a universalist outlook, but accentuate the significance of place and are thus opposed to an abstract universalism.⁷⁰

How does Laroui view modernity as a historical and temporal category? Confronted with representations of Western modernity and the claims to historical novelty made on behalf of Western modernity, he started thinking about the relation of the old and the new.⁷¹ He has also sought to think through reform as a problem of change and continuity, thereby situating himself in the line of Arab reformist thought and nationalist reform.⁷² Laroui argues that a certain view of time, namely, historical time as progress, became predominant in Western modernity. This understanding of time came to be conceived of as relative, which has had epistemological consequences both in the academic and the political realm. Truth, Laroui argues, is neither totally available nor totally unattainable but a matter of becoming. This is the principle that Chakrabarty identifies as the historicist transitional view.⁷³ The notion that truth ›will only gradually take shape‹, is identified by Laroui as the ›foundation of historicism, democracy, and modern science‹.⁷⁴ In this way, he argues, historical

⁶⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 5.

⁶⁷ See e.g. Abdallah Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine. Préf. de Maxime Rodinson* [Nouvelle éd.] (Paris: Maspero, 1982). 167.

⁶⁸ Chakrabarty writes: ›Marxist and liberal thought are legatees of this intellectual heritage. This heritage is now global.‹ Ibid., 4. Laroui, *Islamisme, modernisme, libéralisme*. 132: ›Mais dans un sens large le libéralisme et tout simplement la logique du monde modern, le résultat final des révolutions successives que les historien appellent la modernité.‹ See also on this Laroui, ›Marx and the Intellectual From the Third World.‹

⁶⁹ I follow here the approach of Frederick Cooper, ›Modernity‹, in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, ed. Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁷⁰ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: xvi. Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). 100.

⁷¹ 'Abdallāh Al-'Arwī et al., ›Al-taḥdīṭ wa-l-dīmūqrāṭiyya. Ḥiwār uḡriya li maḡalla Āfāq‹ [Modernization and Democracy. Interview conducted for the journal *Horizons*], in *Autour de la pensée de Abdallah Laroui. Debating Laroui's Theory. Muḥāwarāt fīr 'Abdallāh al-'Arwī*, ed. Bassam El-Kurdi (Casablanca and Beirut: Centre Culturel Arabe, 2000), 13.

⁷² Abdallah Laroui, ›Histoire et rationalité‹, in *Le sens de l'histoire. La raison aux prises avec la condition humaine*, ed. Abdou Filali-Ansary (Casablanca and Rabat: Fondation du Roi Abdul-Aziz al Saoud; Fondation Konrad Adenauer, 2008), 90.

⁷³ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 7, 30-34, 249-251. He is critical of this perspective that tends to reduce various histories and times to only one.

⁷⁴ Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*: 28.

time is privileged over all other forms of time. He describes this as follows:

Liberal culture and modern culture in general took historical time as its supreme value as opposed to other conceptions of time (cosmic, mythical, physical, psychological); it consequently devalued those world views that were founded either on these other conceptions or on a relativization, a placing between parentheses, of historical time. The mythologies, the Platonically inspired philosophies, the religious ideologies, the theologies, the rational metaphysics found upon physical time, the cyclic philosophies of history, the romantic utopias, the philosophies of art, etc., which all subordinate historical time to some higher value, are relegated to the level of unconscious discourse, though doing so entails a search for the cause of this unconsciousness in the socioeconomic structure and an attempt to isolate the »rational core« of each of them.⁷⁵

Liberal and modern culture – synonymous with rationalism and to which Laroui also links a classical form of Marxism⁷⁶ – are thus generally characterized by a historicist view of time, which serves as the basis for judging all other forms of time.

Laroui does not put these views into a teleological ordering in which the modern European view of history is presented as the final apogee of a continuous historical development. The universalist perspective has rather created a certain set of knowledge whose logic can be grasped in its concepts (e.g. state, ideology, freedom, history, rationality). This set of knowledge is both useful in regard to its scientific achievements and currently hegemonic. Although this imposes the need to engage with it, it does not however connote the end of history. The modern configuration of knowledge is a historical product and is, thus, open to change and further development.⁷⁷

But on which level does Laroui locate this modern, liberal historical time? In his book on the crisis of the Arab intellectual, first published in French in 1974, he argues that historical time in fact fell into disregard among intellectuals throughout the twentieth century. He goes so far as to say that the whole twentieth century was a reaction against liberal culture as well as the rationalist

view of history with its historicist notion of time and history. He calls this tendency »postliberal thought«. Just the same, on the societal level it is exactly the historicist view of history that has been predominant in his view. Laroui asks rhetorically: »Anti-historicist, anti-humanist, anti-rationalist, and anti-subjectivist tendencies are current among the Western intelligentsia – but can the same be said of Western society?«⁷⁸ As he sees it, the historicist and rationalist perspective dominates the logics »of the economic, internal and external politics, social morality, educational system and »popular« literature of the West«, »of Western newspapers and the discourses of the »great« at the United Nations and UNESCO«.⁷⁹ According to Laroui, it is the rationale of »history as progress, of rationalism in economics, realism in politics, and humanism in literature and the arts«⁸⁰ that dominates the workings of society.

Laroui further argues that »the society possessing the historicist view is today dominant. It is the language of historicism that is imposing itself upon the world, and he who would preserve his particular view is (all things considered) condemning himself to silence«.⁸¹ For this reason, he argues – similar to Chakrabarty – that if one aims to engage in global debates and international politics, one has to analyse and take account of the historical and temporal make up of modern society and its global, hegemonic role.⁸²

Laroui's view of modern times corresponds with Chakrabarty's analysis of »History 1« as the modern European view of rationalism and progress that reflects a certain ordering of time.⁸³ Both argue that this ordering of time – as a history of progress – is inscribed into modern institutions which now have global reach.⁸⁴ But while they observe a certain degree of institutionalization of such a view of time, they do not claim that it has

⁷⁸ Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*: 10.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 26, 29.

⁸² 'Abdallāh Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-'aql. Maqāla fī l-mufāraqāt* [The Concept of Reason. An Essay on Paradoxes], 3rd ed. (Beirut and Casablanca: Al-markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 2001). 15.

⁸³ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 7, 249-54.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 4-11, 41, pointing to political modernity, university and academic historiography as well as liberalism and Marxism. Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*: 2-3, 28-29. Critical regarding this view of a globalized modernity: Frederick Cooper, »What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective«, *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001). Cf. further on the captivity of the historian in the »modernist climate«: Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*: 30. On the global impact of »Europe«: Arif Dirlik, »Is There History after Eurocentrism?: Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History«, *Cultural Critique* 42 (Spring, 1999).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2-3. Cf. on the temporal dimension of secular conceptions of the political Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 15-16. »The first is that the human exists in a frame of a single and secular historical time that envelops other kinds of time.« Ibid., 16.

⁷⁶ Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*: 2.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, an illustration of this attitude: Abdallah Laroui, *Matinales 1967-1999* (Casablanca: Centre culturel arabe, 2009). 20.

been totalized. On the contrary, they insist on the existence of multiple temporalities.⁸⁵

Chakrabarty argues that Western historicism represents Western modernity – a notion he describes with terms like »Europe«, »European«, »capital«, and »bourgeois« in order to make clear that the underlying discursive logics are the same⁸⁶ – as gradually spreading around the globe. He is, however, critical of this historicist notion of a spreading of modernity over time. Such a transitional view has consequences for how a historical object is periodized, e.g. whether the beginning of modernity is located inside Europe or from a more global perspective. Drawing on well-known definitions of the term historicism – which has a complex history of usages and sometimes seemingly contradictory definitions – Chakrabarty defines it as representing historical objects or epochs as internally unified and developing over time.⁸⁷ In this representation of a »global historical time«, the future development of non-Western societies was conceived of as replicating Western societies, the past of the latter representing the future of those same societies.⁸⁸ In Chakrabarty's view, historicism represents history as a developmental »process in which that which is possible becomes actual by tending to a future that is singular«.⁸⁹

Chakrabarty seeks to uncover the dialectics between this view of history that he calls »History 1« and other histories that he calls »Histories 2«. He considers the latter affective histories of belonging that contain other histories, times and futures.⁹⁰ These disrupt the universalizing logic of History 1, for they defy the teleological path towards a unified totality.⁹¹ He considers them not

a »dialectical Other of the necessary logic of History 1«, but rather an intrinsic part of History 1, »as a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1«.⁹² Likewise, the terms »pre-capitalist« and »feudal« do not necessarily refer to periods that simply pre-date Western modernity.⁹³ They are part of a »unitary time frame within which both the »before« and the »after« of capitalist production can unfold«.⁹⁴ In telling the story this way, it is possible to reproduce the historicist view of time and its overall Eurocentric periodization.⁹⁵ The earlier or other present histories are reduced to the status of being incomplete pre-histories of Western modernity. Periods »before« modernity are only imagined in relation to the latter's narrative framework. In this way, history and time are flattened out. For Chakrabarty, the genre of texts written under the rubric »History of ...« embodies this logic that takes »Europe« – the imaginary, not geographical entity, that has been globalized – as the vantage point from which all history is read.⁹⁶

But, as indicated, Chakrabarty emphasizes that there is a dialectic at work that at the same time disrupts this seeming homogeneity. This dialectic reveals the existence of times other than those imaginable within the time frame of secular modernity. Chakrabarty explains this when discussing Marx' notion of abstract and real labour as key terms of capitalism and modernity.⁹⁷ Abstract labour is, as the term suggests, abstracted from what is considered real labour, that is, what people do as physical beings. The notion of abstract labour reproduces the universalizing logic that characterizes History 1's view of history and time. At the same time, it carries with it the memory of »what it can never completely capture«, that is, the histories from which it is abstracted.⁹⁸ This difference within the »temporal horizon of capital«⁹⁹ expressed by the word pre-capitalist »disrupts the continuity of this time by suggesting another time that is not on the same, secular, homogenous calendar«. One could thus argue that Chakrabarty writes against a one-dimensional conception of time and modernity that reduces history to chronology. He does not want to do away with modernity. It is, as he puts it, both indispensable and inadequate.¹⁰⁰ Like Laroui he stresses the useful-

85 Others have advanced such an argument as well: Koselleck, *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*. and Krzysztof Pomian, *L'ordre du temps*, Bibliothèque des histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). Both criticized the reduction of time to being exclusively linear and cumulative, that is, its reduction to chronology, and argued for an analytic perspective that takes into consideration multiple temporalities. See for a historical study of the multiplicity of lived times: Roman Loimeier, *Eine Zeitlandschaft in der Globalisierung: Das islamische Sansibar im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Global Studies (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012).

86 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 30.

87 Ibid., 23. See on the term historicism e.g.: Frank R. Ankersmit, »Historicism. An Attempt at Synthesis«, *History and Theory* 34, no. 3 (1995); Robert D'Amico, »Historicism«, in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Malden, MA, Oxford and Chichester: Blackwell, 2009).

88 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 7.

89 Ibid., 249.

90 See ibid., 67. »The idea of History 2 allows us to make room, in Marx's own analytic of capital, for the politics of human belonging and diversity. It gives us a ground on which to situate our thoughts about multiple ways of being human and their relationship to the global logic of capital.« One has to add that Chakrabarty's focus on the logic of capital does not imply the reduction of modernity to economy.

91 Ibid., 47-71, 249-55.

92 Both quotes ibid., 66.

93 Ibid., 93.

94 Ibid., 95.

95 Ibid. Cf. Ibid., 65-66.

96 Ibid., 23.

97 Chakrabarty points out that the same dialectic can be found in Marx' notion of the commodity. Ibid., 92.

98 Ibid.

99 This and the following quotes: Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 93.

100 Ibid., 16.

ness of its emancipative elements and criticizes its hegemonic aspects.

Chakrabarty points to the temporal and political effects of History 1 with regard to societies labelled as non-Western. The view of modernity in historicist time has enabled scholars and politicians to assert the backwardness of non-European societies with regard to an imaginary modern Europe. Chakrabarty refers here to Johannes Fabian's expression of the »the denial of co-evalness«.¹⁰¹ This view of modernity made it possible to put those societies into a »waiting-room of history«.¹⁰² Within the frame of History 1, the histories and concepts of capitalism, enlightenment, secularism, rationalism and humanism can be narrated as an invention of a little defined entity called Europe, or the West, which other countries should aspire to embrace, but which have also been deemed *not yet* capable, for instance, of self-rule or reason.¹⁰³ It was therefore possible for other histories – past and present – to be seen through the lens of the history of the »West« alone.

A common example of this is the proposition that Islam has not yet gone through an enlightenment that is understood in the same sense as the European event.¹⁰⁴ This argument presupposes that enlightenment can be seen as a process or period that can – and should – be repeated and that the same cause produces the same effects. It similarly understands »Islam« as a stable homogenous unit that is completely outside History 1 – untouched by, and unrelated to, Western modernity as if there were not a long history of connections between Europe, the Maghreb and the Mashreq, colonialism or waves of globalization. The argument effectively denies people in the here and now – in this case Muslims – the capacity to be democratic, secular-minded or loyal citizens. This denial is enabled by virtue of the transitional historicist logic of History 1. The logic of the »not yet« inserts into the

history and time-line of Western modernity an »Islamic Enlightenment« still to come for which the European Enlightenment is to be a model. So-called inner Orientalism, however, shows that the historicist logic of the »not yet« could also be applied within Europe to those regions not considered a part »of the time«.¹⁰⁵

It is this closure of the allegedly open future horizon of the modern concept of history and its political effect, namely, the tendency to make other histories invisible, that Chakrabarty – like Laroui – criticizes. The historicist view, he objects, absorbs other histories with different periodizations. The latter are conceived as lagging behind and confined within the limits of History 1. But History 1 is in fact a particular history (and to say this says nothing about its value or its global reach) in which certain universals have been articulated. Chakrabarty does not reject these universals, but refuses to identify them with and to limit them exclusively to this particular history itself, that is, the identification of the universal with the particular. To read »history« in this way and, thus, history as singular and universal, negates the open horizon of expectations of societies identified as non-Western.¹⁰⁶ Their histories appear then as incomplete or lacking in relation to History 1. The identification of a particular history with certain universals produces an exclusivist view of these universals. These are then represented as the invention of the modern West that can be »exported« and »implemented« like a commodity elsewhere and within the temporal frame of History 1. Such a historical view of the West and its universals typically overlooks the relevance of what Chakrabarty calls Histories 2, that is, local histories of belonging and, thus, other temporalities.

Therefore, Chakrabarty argues in favour of transcending this kind of historicist frame: »To take that step is to rethink the problem of historical time and to review the relationship between the possible and the actual.«¹⁰⁷ In opposition to reductions to a single temporality, he stresses the »heterotemporality« of the world.¹⁰⁸ He thus concludes:

101 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), quote 33, cf. *Ibid.*, 33-69.

102 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 8-9.

103 *Ibid.*, 7-8.

104 The equally common recourse to the Reformation follows the same temporal logic. This in turn has provoked attempts to identify an Islamic Enlightenment: Reinhard Schulze, »Was ist die islamische Aufklärung?«, *Die Welt des Islams* 36, no. 3 (1996); Gottfried Hagen and Tilman Seidensticker, »Reinhard Schulzes Hypothese einer islamischen Aufklärung: Kritik einer historiographischen Kritik«, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 148 (1998); see also: Mona Abaza, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment, Barbarism and Islam*, ed. NIAS (Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences), Ortelius Lecture 5 (Wassenaar: NIAS, 2007). The overall temporal frame of such propositions is questioned as such in: Khaled El-Rouayheb, »Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century«, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 2 (2006).

105 Sebastian Conrad, »Eingeborenepolitik« in Kolonie und Metropole. »Erziehung zur Arbeit« in Ostafrika und Ostwestfalen«, in *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

106 Koselleck, »Erfahrungsraum« und »Erwartungshorizont«.

107 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 249.

108 *Ibid.*, 95. Recently, Chakrabarty has emphasized that he regards the issue of time and temporality, that is, History 1 and Histories 2, as the key elements in his book *Provincializing Europe*: »Theoretically speaking, this business of history 1 and history 2 goes to the heart of what I was attempting to do in PE«. Dipesh Chakrabarty, »In Defense of Provincializing Europe: A Response to Carola Dietze«, *History and Theory* 17, no. 1 (2008): 92; Carola Dietze, »Toward a History on Equal Terms: A Discussion of »Provincial-

»It is not enough to historicize ›history‹, the discipline, for that only uncritically keeps in place the very understanding of time that enables us to historicize in the first place. The point is to ask how this seeming imperious, all-pervasive code might be deployed or thought about so that we have at least a glimpse of its own finitude, a glimpse of what might constitute an outside to it.«¹⁰⁹

This concern with the relation of the possible and the actual – and thus politics as human action – also lies at the heart of Laroui's analyses of concepts and time. Both their analyses of representations of history have an eminently political dimension. They each question established and dominant accounts of the now and the real that are shaped to a large degree by the Western historicist view of history and modernity. In response, they engage with the underlying representations of time in relation to the dialectic between the particular and the universal.

This perspective thus changes the view of the possible. It does not take the present as an empty now, a mere and quasi-automatic repetition of something pre-existing within the temporal frame of History 1. Rather, it imagines the interpretative work on the present – and what shapes this present – as performative, as an activity that bears the potential to create new, different and differential meanings in the struggle over representations.¹¹⁰

izing Europe«», *History and Theory* 47, no. 1 (2008). See also the critical remarks on Chakrabarty's approach in Harry Harootunian, »Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem«, *Boundary* 32, no. 2 (2005): 34-36, 39-40. Harootunian criticizes Chakrabarty for overlooking in a Weberian manner capitalism as temporal category »by installing cultural space in its place in the effort to secure the effect of bracketing time«. Ibid., 35. He seems to imply that Chakrabarty tries to secure a »unique difference« of local, supposedly authentic cultural forms »immune to the deterritorialization forcibly imposed from without«. He identifies this as an appeal »to cultural resources undisturbed by modernization«. He links this to the privileging of space over time in postcolonial discourse with its binarism with Europe or the West as its first term and »that has imperially reduced the rest of the world to the status of a second term«. Ibid., 35. Chakrabarty emphasizes, however, the dialectical relation between History 1 and Histories 2. Furthermore, as the example of abstract and real labour shows, this distinction is not the same as the distinction between Europe and non-Europe. Therefore, I rather think that Chakrabarty's approach is about the relation of Western modernity, other modernities and authenticity beyond the confines of both Eurocentric and culturalist frameworks. See also Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 82-83, where the author argues against cultural relativism.

¹⁰⁹ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 93.

¹¹⁰ See for this aspect: Bhabha, »DissemiNation«, 145-47, 159-61. Bhabha distinguishes between the pedagogical on the one hand, and the performative on the other as two ways of narrating the nation and as two different temporalities. While he identifies the first with historicist national time, the second, his view, embodies and brings to light the internal heterogeneity of nations with their different times. Ibid., esp. 147-48, 153-54.

Both authors formulate a response to a problematic born out of differing postcolonial situations in which many people see themselves confronted with a hegemonic form of what is called Western modernity and its view of time towards which they have to somehow position themselves.¹¹¹

Chakrabarty argues that the historicist way of looking at the world – based on a certain periodization – evoked resistance in the form of an insistence on the now that served to refute the logic of the historicist ›not yet‹. He locates this insistence on the now in a time between the First World War and the decolonization movements of the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹² It represented a claim to contemporaneity and, thus, to political modernity and the status of postcolonial subjects as full political beings. It was a claim that they did not ›yet‹ have to learn how to become truly political subjects.¹¹³ It is possible to situate Laroui in this context. He rejects the »waiting-room of history« to which he would be relegated from the perspective of Western historicism. The foreword to the second edition of his book *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*, which was first published in 1967, is telling in this respect. It was originally written in the intellectual climate after Morocco's independence, a time when an all-encompassing revolution seemed at hand. This hope did not materialize, as he observes in hindsight.¹¹⁴ But he generally writes in opposition to perspectives that do not allow for representations of people having the capacity for political action. In short, he is opposed to perspectives that represent people as beings outside the realm of the political.

He rejects culturalist positions that reduce humans to culture, which is considered static and completely determinative. From this point of view, people are merely extensions of a larger cultural substance. The culturalization of politics draws on this model of time and history, similarly implying a view of the subject as unchanging.¹¹⁵ Older ver-

¹¹¹ That includes rejections of Western modernity, as well as critiques of what is called Western rationalism and universalism: Thomas Blom Hansen, »Inside the Romanticist Episteme«, *Social Scientist* 24, no. 1/3 (1996). See also Dipesh Chakrabarty and Saurabh Dube, »Presence of Europe: An Interview with Dipesh Chakrabarty«, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 864-65. Laroui argues that twentieth-century Arab thought is as a whole a response to the challenge of Western modernity. See Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*.

¹¹² Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 8.

¹¹³ An example of this attitude is Anouar Abdel-Malek, »Orientalism in Crisis«, *Diogenes* 44 (1963). On this transitional view of »education« within liberalism: Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, »The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World«, *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 1 (2005): 14-15.

¹¹⁴ Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*: x.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Akeel Bilgrami, »Secularism and Relativism«, *Boundary* 31, no. 2 (2004).

sions of Orientalism made it possible to speak of the Muslim in the singular and also drew on culturalist logic.¹¹⁶ Culturalization also informs Islamic positions that speak only of the role of Muslims as believers, their faith and practice, and only define their lives according to the theological time of religious calling (*da'wa*). The same temporal logic is at work when reality is viewed simply in terms of probability and risk. As a consequence, every possible future event is considered only in relation to a pre-estimated and seemingly predetermined historical series.¹¹⁷

What the aforementioned perspectives have in common is that they naturalize time: they represent one view of time as the only one and thus tend to make other times, especially the time of politics, invisible.¹¹⁸ In contrast, Laroui argues that every human activity has a distinct temporality and that these temporalities are discontinuous.¹¹⁹

116 See Aziz al-Azmeh, »Muslim History, Reflections on Periodisation and Categorisation«, *The Medieval History Journal* 19, no. 1/2 (1998). The same critique applies to naturalist accounts of the real that tend to reduce humans to nature, while defining the latter notion in a mechanistic way.

117 Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ*, Vol 2.: 406. The film *Along came Polly* (2004) illustrates this logic with regard to a risk assessor of an insurance company, Reuben. At some point in the story, he compares the odds of a relationship with his former and his present partner with his professional risk analysis system. When his current friend Polly finds out about this, she reacts furiously. On the one hand, this story is about the well-known opposition of reason and feelings. But it could be also seen as telling about Chakrabarty's distinction of History 1 and Histories 2. Reuben's job represents History 1, whereas his romantic relationship and Polly represent more affective histories of belonging. On the other hand, it makes a point about time frames and human action. It puts on stage the ubiquity of probability calculations in modern societies. At the same time, it attempts to demonstrate that acting only according to pre-estimated and seemingly predetermined patterns – which are periodizations – is inhuman. The film is about how Reuben gradually breaks free from this single time frame as orientation in the modern world and moves towards a different history, more alike to Histories 2. Polly's – as the title indicates – unexpected appearance in his life is no longer imaginable within risk calculations and quantification alone, but within a story – and thus time – of meaningfulness and love. On risk as a problem of time: Nassehi, *Die Zeit der Gesellschaft*: 337-44.

118 Laroui, *Islam et histoire*: esp. 105.

119 Laroui is also concerned with the question of how these temporalities relate to each other in historical settings such as pre-modern and modern times. The question of the relation between different times and histories has long been the subject of discussion among Marxist authors. The similar stress on the discontinuous character of temporalities and thus against the proposition of a single now and a unity of economic, political, aesthetic, philosophical and other elements of the social is made in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*. Translated by Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970). 99-102. Cf. on Louis Althusser (1919-1990) who was born in Algeria and then studied and lived in Paris: John R. Hall, »The Time of History and the History of Times«, *History & Theory* 19, no. 2 (1980): 119-20. François Dosse, *Geschichte des Strukturalismus. Band 1: Das Feld des Zeichens, 1945-1966*. Aus dem Französischen von Ste-

The perspectives described above fail to acknowledge the existence of different dimensions of human activity with distinct temporalities.¹²⁰ Since these perspectives represent history as natural history and not as the realm of human action, the role of the human being as a political actor – in other words, his agency – is denied. Political action is situated, then, only within naturalized time. Hence, Laroui underscores the importance of breaking up time into distinct temporalities in order to counter the naturalization of time that he interprets as a regular effect of the emergence of traditions. In fact, to break up the temporal unity of the historical units in question – e.g. modernity or Islam – represents for him the key to conceiving politics as human action.¹²¹

Laroui has long criticized such a naturalization and unification of time in both Western modern and Islamic discourses.¹²² A key aspect of his critique of the Arab reformist discourse can be seen in his understanding that the latter treated modernity in an eclectic, abstract manner and thus in abstract, typological time only.¹²³ As a result, time was basically treated as unified and naturalized. What he seems to argue is that this precluded the development of a proper view of the appropriation of modernity in the time of politics, which is to say, not as a copy of an original, but as a new use and appropriation of a hegemonic model.

In his later works, Laroui discusses the question of multiple temporalities in a more theoretical manner. His analytic perspective draws attention to how a historical event is produced by naming it in a certain way, putting it into a certain historical series and, thus, periodizing it. Based on his study of historiography, Laroui distinguishes two basic views of history, time and truth that lead to different forms of periodization. He considers the first view to be philosophical, theological and absolute; the second view, in his terminology, is a relative, profane and pragmatic view of history, time and truth. Within the first epistemic frame, historically new situations are integrated into an existing narrative or tradition; within the second epistemic frame, historically new situations can be

fan Barmann (Hamburg: Junius, 1996). 440-41, 83. But see also: Koselleck, *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*. Cf. on Koselleck: Harootunian, »Some Thoughts on Comparability«, 25. Helge Jordheim, »Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities«, *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012).

120 Therefore, Laroui is opposed to perspectives that give precedence to structure over time, be it culturalism or structuralism. Arguing similarly: Fabian, *Time and the Other*: 55-56, who points out that simply identifying chronology with history naturalizes time.

121 Butler, »Sexual politics, torture, and secular time«, 20-21, makes a similar point.

122 Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*: 70-71.

123 Fabian, *Time and the Other*: 23-24.

addressed as new ones, that is, not as being linked to the origin of the master narrative.

It is important to stress that both sides of this distinction do not emerge in Laroui's analysis as mere elements of a secularization narrative that locates the philosophical/theological view of history in an outdated – Islamic – past and the allegedly profane, practical view of history in the – European modern – present. He discerns them rather in European, North African and Middle Eastern historical traditions alike as a distinction between the time of memory – institutionalized by tradition and its guardians – and the time of politics.¹²⁴ Against culturalist claims and based on his study of Arabic Muslim historiography as a particular tradition, he stresses from a universalist perspective the heterotemporality of social reality in general. He strongly opposes claims made by both Orientalists and guardians of the *sunna* who, in his view, reduce Islam to a single time frame, namely, the time of memory and tradition. By thus inserting the particular tradition of Muslim historiography into a universal problematic, his perspective breaks from a given periodization of an already defined time span that is termed Islamic and in which all events that seem to belong to this term are located.¹²⁵

It is worthwhile to look more closely at the *Denkfigur* of breaking up of time that Laroui and Chakrabarty employ. While they both write in distinct contexts, it is important to point out that this way of arguing is neither limited to these two authors, nor to the postcolonial situation.¹²⁶ To demonstrate its broad application, I will give a few examples from the field of historiography.

As indicated earlier, historians usually employ new periodizations to question established views of a topic under investigation. A further common strategy of re-periodization, in this respect, is the search for forerunners. This may again be observed in various contexts. For instance, since the nineteenth century Arab reformers have questioned the claim to the absolute novelty of Western modernity by pointing out cultural transfers from the Muslim world to Christian Europe or by noting that the term from the early Islamic period *šūrā* (council, today also parliament) in fact had the same meaning as the modern concept of democra-

cy.¹²⁷ While such a view is often criticized as being apologetic, it is important to ask what precisely is considered apologetic in this view. To respond to this, one can look at the issue as a matter of representing time. The view labelled as apologetic puts the concepts *šūrā* and democracy on the level of abstract time only. If one adopts such a standpoint, the possibility of historical and conceptual change does not come into view. It would be, however, misleading to call such a perspective unhistorical (as is frequently done). It rather reflects a certain view of time that is taken in this case to trump all other views of time. The problem here is not the typological time of comparison. Instead, it is the restriction to a single time frame that fuels criticisms of such equations of older and more recent concepts. What is called apologetic in this example can be considered an attempt at re-periodization. Here, the novelty of a concept defined as Western and its hegemonic status are challenged. It becomes clear that the translation of foreign concepts into one's own tradition is therefore laden with problems of periodization and the use of time and history in general.¹²⁸

Observed on this level, this way of arguing is not in fact radically different from the argumentation of a number of academic historians who have questioned the absolute novelty of Western modernity by pointing to earlier renaissances, continuities of older and more recent forms of nationalism, etc.¹²⁹ Another example of this *Denkfigur* is the debate on the relativity of the historian's perspective. In debates on historiography, postmodernism and constructivism, exponents of the latter seem to subscribe to the notion of a plurality of truths and question the notion of objectivity. Historians who are critical of such perspectives have sometimes pointed to the notion of *Sehepunkt* (viewpoint) used by the theologian and historian Johann Martin Chladenius (1710-1759) in order to argue that the postmodern and constructivist insight is not so new after all.¹³⁰ Postmodern and construc-

124 Laroui, *Islam et histoire*: 38-40, 51, 117, 125-26. 'Abdallāh Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ. Al-ḡuz al-auwwal. Al-alfāz wa-l-maḡāhib* [The Concept of History. Vol. 1: Expressions and Schools] (Beirut and Casablanca: Al-markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-'arabī, 1997). 205-22.

125 For reasons of space, I cannot further discuss Laroui's distinction in this paper.

126 E.g. Fabian, *Time and the Other*: esp. 21-25 has challenged representations of time in anthropology and its intellectual sources by effectively showing different uses of time in anthropology – physical, typological, intersubjective.

127 The point here is about time, not about the widely debated question whether a religion is reconcilable with democracy. Cf. for the context of Arab Muslim reformists: Azzam Tamimi, »Islam and Democracy from Tahtawi to Ghannouchi«, *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 45-47. See also Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Die Islamisierung des Islam. Imaginäre Welten einer politischen Theologie. Aus dem Englischen von Ulrich Enderwitz* (Frankfurt a.M. and New York: Campus, 1996). 57-59. Gudrun Krämer, »Islamist Notions of Democracy«, *Middle East Report* 183, no. July-August (1993): 7.

128 Cf. Laroui, *Islam et modernité*: 175.

129 E.g. Caspar Hirschi, »Vorwärts in neue Vergangenheiten. Funktionen des humanistischen Nationalismus in Deutschland«, in *Funktionen des Humanismus. Studien zum Nutzen des Neuen in der humanistischen Kultur*, ed. Thomas Maissen and Gerrit Walther (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006).

130 For this debate see e.g. Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus: eine Einführung* (München:

tivist historians, in turn, might consider this argument to overemphasize the continuity between then and now. They might further ask critically whether Chladenius' context is the same as the one in which historians write today and whether the word actually implied in Chladenius' life world the modern relativity of the observer of modern social systems. They would thus take issue with the representation of historical difference and doubt that one could legitimately speak of a similarity in this case. In my view, however, there is a connection between these moments of critique, on the one hand, and Laroui's and Chakrabarty's perspectives, on the other. They all practice or take issue with a certain use of time, which I will turn to now.

Challenging hegemonic time

What is challenged in the examples just described can be termed as empty and homogenous time. In the following, I want to show the relevance of this issue for the representation of modernity and Islam. I argue that it is a view of time that can be traced in institutionalized uses of time, as well as moments in which these very uses are challenged and confronted with other times.¹³¹

What does the notion of empty, homogenous time entail? It can be understood as referring to a certain way of representing a historical object – a nation, modernity, or Islam, for example – within the historical process. When represented in this way, these historical objects seem to basically exist throughout time in an unchanged state. While change can be represented as ›becoming‹ in this picture, the frame of empty, homogenous time guarantees a fundamental continuity that is naturalized and can thus be taken for granted.

The notion of homogenous and empty time is used in a critical sense by Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) in his text on the concept of history.¹³² It also figures prominently in Benedict Anderson's

often cited study of modern nationalism.¹³³ Homi Bhabha has taken issue with this view of time since it naturalizes the frame of political discussions in which the latter are carried out and thus predetermines possible arguments.¹³⁴ Moreover, the view of homogenous and empty time is central to Chakrabarty's discussion of modernity, regarding both its historicist logic of the ›not yet‹ and its overall view of history as secular.¹³⁵ These examples illustrate that the notion of empty, homogenous time is vital to the interpretation of modernity from various vantage points.

One could consequently say that in the use of the notion of empty, homogenous time attempts are made to grasp practices of time in modern societies. It is thus connected to moments in which hegemonic time frames are challenged. This becomes especially clear in the postcolonial debate, in which Bhabha and Chakrabarty are but two representative examples.¹³⁶ Despite postcolonial critiques of Eurocentric views of the history of modernity within empty, homogenous time, they have themselves been criticized for reproducing the very same view of time by proposing a view centred around a linear periodization of the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial.¹³⁷

Stuart Hall presents a critique of this critique: He argues that the term postcolonial ›offers – as all periodizations do – an alternative narrative, highlighting different key conjunctures to those embedded in the classical narrative of Modernity‹.¹³⁸ What he rejects – along with others – is that colonialism is put into the larger story of modernity as a ›local or marginal sub-plot in some larger story (for example, the transition from feudalism to capitalism in western Europe)‹.¹³⁹ Colonisation, in this perspective, is not a mishap that is now simply overcome, but ›assumes the place

Beck, 1992). 17-18, considering the perspective of late Enlightenment historiography to be constructivist while apparently setting this constructivism apart from its current forms. See also on the difference between Chladenius' conception of history and later ones: Nassehi, *Die Zeit der Gesellschaft*: 197-98.

131 On moments ›[w]hen time becomes urgent‹, Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History*: 6-15. She links the observation that time is currently on the agenda again to ›the exhaustion of the previously dominant analytical paradigms: Marxism, modernization theory, Annales school, postmodernism and post-structuralism, and identity politics.‹ *ibid.*, 20. See also Jürgen Osterhammel, ›Über die Periodisierung der neueren Geschichte‹ (Vortrag in der Geisteswissenschaftlichen Klasse am 29. November 2002), in Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.), *Berichte und Abhandlungen* 10 (2006): 46-47.

132 Walter Benjamin, *Sprache und Geschichte. Philosophische Essays*. Ausgewählt von Rolf Tiedemann. Mit einem Essay von Theodor W. Adorno (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992). 150.

133 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2006). 24-26, 33, 69, 116, 145, 194. On the impact of Anderson's use of Benjamin's notion: Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History*: 18-20.

134 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). 5-6, 95, 136, 152-53, 162, 245-50, on Anderson 159-61.

135 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 12, 23, 47-96, also referring to Friedrich Nietzsche's and Michel Foucault's critiques of continuist visions of history.

136 See Keya Ganguly, ›Temporality and Postcolonial Critique‹, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: 2004).

137 Anne McClintock, ›The Angel of Progress. Pitfalls of the Term ›Post-Colonialism‹‹, *Social Text* 31/32 (1992); Ella Shohat, ›Notes On the Postcolonial‹, *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): understanding the term postcolonial as chronological term. Cf. Harootyan, ›Some Thoughts on Comparability‹, 35.

138 Stuart Hall, ›When was ›the Post-Colonial‹? Thinking at the Limit‹, in *The Post-Colonial Question. Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 249.

139 *Ibid.*

and significance of a major, extended and ruptural world-historical event«. ¹⁴⁰ Hall thus proposes going beyond the narrative frame of Western modernity as it is located and periodized in a particular way: »It is the retrospective re-phrasing of Modernity within the framework of ›globalisation‹ in all its various ruptural forms and moments (from the Portuguese entry to the Indian Ocean and the conquest of the New World to the internationalisation of financial markets and information flows) which is the really distinctive element in a ›post-colonial‹ periodization.« ¹⁴¹

I would further argue that the underlying *Denkfigur* is not limited to the postcolonial debate. For instance, recent global historical approaches criticize national historiography for considering nations as containers disconnected from global history. They argue that connections were crucial, even with regard to the shaping of those societies when conceived within national limits. ¹⁴² From the perspective of national history, global history can appear like a mere extension of national history within empty, homogenous time. The perspective of global history, on the other hand, challenges the confinement to one overarching national time frame.

One faces this *Denkfigur* of challenging empty, homogenous time in Benjamin's text on the concept of history as well. Here, it is the French Revolution – often considered the founding moment of political modernity – that introduces a new time and is represented as a caesura. ¹⁴³ According to Benjamin, Maximilien Robbespierre saw ancient Rome as a past full with »now time« that he forcefully removed from the continuum of history and homogenous, empty time. He further observes that the modern notion of history as progress is intimately linked to the latter: »The notion of the progress of mankind in history cannot be separated from the notion of the progression of the latter in a homogenous and empty time. The critique of the notion of this progression must be the basis of a critique of the notion of progress in general.« ¹⁴⁴ Progression

within empty, homogenous time would thus imply a mere continuity, which is what Benjamin here is arguing against.

By the same token, representing modernity or enlightenment as a commodity that Westerners have simply invented and possess, and which others do not, treats time as empty and homogenous. It also lends itself to a view that understands modernity as something that is easily definable by a certain number of characteristics like individualization, democratization, industrialization, etc. ¹⁴⁵ Speaking of cultures or concepts like Western modernity and Islam in such an abstracted way quickly implies a typological temporality that makes one think of modernity as an unchanging thing, like a container or commodity moving through secular, empty and homogenous time. ¹⁴⁶ Critiques of such effects of unification and commodification that stress the individual fashioning or appropriation of given models in a particular use – such as modernity – point to different narratives or time frames. The question is then whether the time frame of this particular history is again taken as absolute or not.

But even if other periodizations are introduced within a larger frame, it is still possible to end up with a perspective that takes the larger time frame and its narrative as simply given. An article by the historian Shlomo Dov Goitein, in which he pleads for the periodization of Islamic history, is a good example of this. The larger frame of Islam eventually guarantees the emptiness and homogeneity of time, despite the attempt at critical re-periodization. ¹⁴⁷ One can also return again to the example of Hodgson's periodization of Islamic history in order to make this point clear. Aziz al-Azmeh has argued that Hodgson's view of Islam – which is mostly considered a de-essentializing outlook on Islamic history from a universalist perspective – is eventually equally continuist and »an almost predestinarian history of the complex emergence of what he termed shari'a-mindedness«. ¹⁴⁸ It is this underlying assertion that Azmeh targets of a history simply repeating itself and thus being, in a

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid., 250. He continues: »In this way, the ›post-colonial‹ marks a critical interruption into that whole grand historiographical narrative which, in liberal historiography and Weberian historical sociology, as much as in the dominant traditions of Western Marxism, gave this global dimension a subordinate presence in a story which could essentially be told from within its European parameters.«

142 Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisierung und Nation im deutschen Kaiserreich* (München: Beck, 2006).

143 Benjamin, *Sprache und Geschichte*: 150-51.

144 Ibid., 150. »Die Vorstellung eines Fortschritts des Menschengeschlechts in der Geschichte ist von der Vorstellung ihres eine homogene und leere Zeit durchlaufenden Fortgangs nicht abzulösen. Die Kritik an der Vorstellung dieses Fortgangs muß die Grundlage der Kritik an der Vorstellung des Fortschritts überhaupt bilden.« (Original German, my translation).

145 It is interesting to recall that Chakrabarty's *History 1* represents – apart from being the time of universalizing reason – the time of capitalism that is also basically empty and homogenous. He is not alone in this diagnosis: Anthony Giddens speaks of an »emptying of time« with the shift to modernity that is, in his view, the precondition to the »emptying of space«. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). 17-21, quote 18.

146 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 23. Fabian, *Time and the Other*: 23-24, 31. Al-Azmeh, »Muslim History, Reflections on Periodisation and Categorisation«.

147 Shlomo Dov Goitein, »A Plea for the Periodisation of Islamic History«, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, no. 2 (1968).

148 Al-Azmeh, »Muslim History, Reflections on Periodisation and Categorisation«, 206.

way, empty.¹⁴⁹ As mentioned earlier, Laroui argues that Hodgson's attempt at re-periodizing Islamic history remains formal and does not integrate Islamic history into world history, but instead into the Christian time frame.

In the same way, both Laroui and Chakrabarty challenge the representation of modernity in empty, homogenous time. Chakrabarty points out that even a dialectic perspective on History 1 and Histories 2, in the end, might leave the temporal dominance of the former untouched. As discussed earlier, he thus argues for a view that looks at how Histories 2 disrupt the »totalizing thrusts of History 1«. ¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Laroui does not plead for a simple adoption of Western modernity or a mere »application« of Kant's critique, taken metonymically for the Enlightenment. Equally, he rejects the view of Islamist authors who represent early Islam as a model that can be simply »applied« here and now.

Such an approach implies a view of time as empty and homogenous. This would rely on a sender-receiver model of communication that represents non-Western and non-modern societies as basically passive recipients. It would deny the capacity of people to act in ways other than just receiving a certain kind of knowledge. By analyzing the universal and the particular as two temporal frames that are in tension with each other, Laroui develops a notion of human action that underlines the capacity of people to critically appropriate what they consider useful (e.g. certain concepts or universals).

Both Chakrabarty's and Laroui's analyses demonstrate that to criticize a certain notion and narrative of progress is not necessarily the same as rejecting the notion of progress itself or certain elements of that narrative. By suggesting a different, new use of a certain model – i.e. Western modernity – and asking what is particular and universal about it, they transcend its representation within a unitary time frame (what Chakrabarty calls History 1). In this way, they can think about modernization with Western modernity, while taking into account and opposing its hegemonic status. Their perspective corresponds to a view of

global connectedness, connections, borrowing and conflicts rather than closed, stable cultural units that are conceived as holistic.¹⁵¹

The approach of breaking up a temporal continuum can be also shown in Laroui's own conceptual practice.¹⁵² I will briefly show this with regard to the notion of retardation (Arabic *ta'ahhur*, French *retard*). In this term, the historicist logic of the »not yet« – using Chakrabarty's language – arises again. As explained earlier, from such a perspective societies considered non-Western can be seen as primitive and lagging behind with regard to »the West«, which is taken as a universal standard. Retardation can then almost be viewed as absolute. In this representation, non-Western societies have the task of retracing step by step the historical development of what is called the West, which is conceived as being internally homogenous.¹⁵³

Although Laroui is well acquainted with the implications of the term retardation when used in this way, he uses it nevertheless – yet in a different sense.¹⁵⁴ In his use, retardation also denotes an »absolute failure of the dominated society«. ¹⁵⁵ But retardation can only be observed, if one chooses Western modernity as a model for reform.¹⁵⁶ By contrast, Laroui points out that if the early Islamic era is chosen as a model for reform, as a lot of authors do today, it makes no sense to speak of retardation with regard to Europe.¹⁵⁷ As a consequence,

¹⁵¹ Cf. on the romanticist legacy in such culturalist views Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Times of History. Universal topics in Islamic historiography* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2007). Esp. 3-25. The term Romanticism can, of course, be again periodized and contextualized differently. Either one tells its history as one of a European idea that spread around the globe, or one looks at it as a more complex global history whose continuity cannot be taken for granted.

¹⁵² See on this figure of thought in Koselleck's approach: Jordheim, »Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities«, 160-61, 169-70.

¹⁵³ Only in this way it is possible for Fredric Jameson to refer to »a counterintuitive lag in the modernization of Europe, where, even at the turn of the last century and the putative heyday of high modernism, only a minute percentage of the social and physical space of the West could be considered either fully modern in technology or production or substantially bourgeois in its class culture«, Fredric Jameson, »The End of Temporality«, *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 699 (my emphasis).

¹⁵⁴ Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*. Laroui, »Marx and the Intellectual From the Third World«, 1-10.

¹⁵⁵ Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*: 2.

¹⁵⁶ At the same time, Laroui makes clear that his aim is not Westernization. His aim is to appropriate Western modernity first and then to go beyond its framework toward a local form of modernity. See Laroui, *Islamisme, modernisme, libéralisme*: 131. »Le marxisme est né, me semble-t-il, pour libérer l'esprit des individus, mais à une condition primordiale: c'est qu'il soit compris comme une critique, acceptation/dépassement, du libéralisme; sinon il devient un élément de régression, non de progrès.«

¹⁵⁷ Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-'aql*: 12, 14-15, 17, 352-64. This relativity of time frames is also apparent in debates among

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. »The repetitor is not history, but the historian.« Cf. Ibid., 203 on the organicist legacy in views of Islam. »Historical change and alterity are thereby construed in continuity with a singular Muslim beginning whose continuity over time is endogenous and self-enclosed, presupposed in its Koranic or Arabian beginnings, and the unit of this decline being construed, like the West and in counterposition to it, according to what might be characterised as a totemic geography of East and West, with Islam inhabiting the former in this particular context.« This points to the dialectic of the singular and the recurrent, as well as the question of how to conceive of traditions as processes of canonization. For reasons of space, I cannot, however, further analyze Laroui's positions on these issues here.

¹⁵⁰ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 66.

retardation is a difference of time, not of value. It is relative, namely, in relation to a deliberately chosen standard, a model that has a particular history, in which certain universals are articulated that are now to a large degree globalized.¹⁵⁸

Similarly, Laroui uses the concept historicism (French *historicisme*, his Arabic neologism *tārīḥānīya*) in a way that goes beyond the historicism that Chakrabarty rightly criticizes. Laroui locates it within Maghrebi, Mashreqi and Euro-American historical traditions, but from a universalist perspective.¹⁵⁹ For him, historicism provides a means to think through, as he says, tested ways of action and to understand oneself and others in a temporal perspective.¹⁶⁰ Again, it would be possible to read Laroui's use of the concept of historicism within empty, homogenous time. It could then simply be situated within Western Marxism as a discourse in which the concept has already been fully developed, whereby Laroui's use of the term would be measured against this standard. That would situate his use of the term as a historical event within a European periodization. It would take this frame as absolute.¹⁶¹

German historians. In German historiography the so-called *Sonderwegsdebatte* is now considered obsolete because Germany is seen as having arrived in 'the West'. See Roger Chickering, »Drei Gesichter des Kaiserreiches«, *NPL* 41, no. 3 (1996). The *Sonderwegsdebatte* can appear as *finally obsolete* and now overcome when one stays within one frame of empty, homogenous time of disciplinary or political progress. From this perspective, other future or past situations in which a dominant model seemed worthy of appropriation are not imagined. The reasons for this is that the model – Western modernity or simply the West – is still taken as model. Again, that is not an argument in favor of or against this choice as such. Rather, it is to draw attention to how time becomes absolute when a certain narrative framework taken for granted.

158 See Laroui, »Marx and the Intellectual From the Third World«, 121.

159 All these terms have, of course, a long and complex history. I understand them here loosely as referring to the regions north, south and east to the Mediterranean.

160 Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*: ix. Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ*. Vol 2.: 390-91. Gallagher and Laroui, »Interview – The Life and Times of Abdallah Laroui«, 138, 142-45, 148. Abdellah Labdaoui, *Les nouveaux intellectuels arabes* (Paris: Ed. L'Harmattan, 1993). 225-30. He is well aware of the history of the term and its definitions in the Euro-American sphere in historiography, philosophy and economy. See Laroui, *Islam et histoire*: 125-38, 155, fn 17. He points out that the historicist revolutions in Europe as described by Friedrich Meinecke and Ernst Cassirer were not the first ones. What made them unique in his view is their simultaneity with the scientific revolution. He seeks to locate the temporal logic of the modern concept historicism in a wider, universal perspective of people living within and handling time, e.g. when they aspire to change or to understand themselves. Cf. Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*: 113-15.

161 Abdelkebir Khatibi, »Pensée – autre«, in *Maghreb pluriel*, ed. Abdelkebir Khatibi (Paris: Denoël, 1983), 23. Cf. Chakrabarty's notion of a »hyperreal Europe«: Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: 45-46.

Laroui himself compares the situation in which he writes to nineteenth century Germany and Russia, which were confronted with France as a dominant model.¹⁶² This raises the question of how to historicize and thus periodize moments of challenging hegemonic time. One could respond to this question in a solely systematic, typological manner and say that it is a general potential of humans as political and speaking animals to question established narratives. But this universalist periodization within the frame of mankind would say little about particular situations in which hegemonic time frames are challenged. It would thus empty out time again. From a Western culturalist stance, it could also be argued that the capacity to relativize time by insisting on the time of politics as human action was absent in Muslim or any other societies before the French Revolution. Such a periodization – which has been quite common with regard to the inventions of modernity such as democracy, individuality and capitalism – equally empties the time of both histories, Western modernity and the excluded other. In this representation, significant change only happens once, namely, at a certain point of origin, and time is emptied out. In this way, continuity is privileged. Challenging empty, homogenous time implies taking recourse to discontinuity. This leads us back to the beginning of this article and the relation of the singular and the recurrent in periodizations as views of time. Laroui argues that both levels correspond to distinct temporalities, but are dialectically intertwined.¹⁶³ He further maintains that the modern concept of history and modern historical thinking are characterized by this dialectic of the singular and the recurrent. He points out that the ambivalent perception of historicism as either privileging continuity or the singular reflects this temporal dialectic. It expresses two different uses of time. Put differently: the side of the dialectic one emphasizes depends on the circumstances.¹⁶⁴ When Laroui advances notions such as »caesura« (Arabic *qaṭī'a*, French *coupure*) and »transcending« or »going beyond« (Arabic *tajāwuz*, French *dépassement*), he emphasizes the first side of the dialectic – the caesura or the going beyond and, thus, the singular, without, however, losing sight of the fact that it is

162 The Moroccan philosopher Mohamed El-Jabri criticizes Laroui for making this comparison. He deems these respective situations to be incomparable. Mohamed El-Jabri, »Musāhama fī naqd al-aidiūlūgī [Contribution to the Critique of Ideology]«, in *Autour de la pensée de Abdallah Laroui. Debating Laroui's Theory. Muḥāwarāt fīr 'Abdallāh al-'Arwī*, ed. Bassam Kurdi (Casablanca and Beirut: Centre Culturel Arabe, 2000). 95. The stress on the singular and the specific leads in El-Jabri's case, which represents an approach to which Laroui is opposed, to an assertion of incomparability.

163 Al-'Arwī, *Mafhūm al-tārīḥ*. Vol 2.: esp. 387-91, 401-07.

164 *Ibid.*, 406.

itself intimately bound to the other side of this dialectic.¹⁶⁵

In this way, he also advances a temporal analysis of the logic of reform that needs to mediate the singular and the recurrent as change and continuity. Reforms also imply certain periodizations. They are always representations of history and time. By relativizing the given time frame of Western modernity as a model for reform, Laroui and Chakrabarty open it up to think through the dialectic of the universal and the particular as a problem of time.

Conclusion

I have read Laroui's and Chakrabarty's arguments about time as a response to a universal and particular problematics in the context of writing history and acting politically in postcolonial situations in Morocco, India and beyond. On the one hand, their arguments are about practices of time in general. On the other hand, they are about a certain situation in which they see themselves confronted with certain traditions – the focus here was on modernity and Islam – that are represented within certain time frames. I have further discussed how the authors analyse modernity and Islam as formations of time. They both take issue with the reduction of time and history to one frame and, thus, one periodization. Their approach goes beyond the suggestion of using multiple periodizations as a means to relativize established ones. Multiple periodizations can still leave the respective frames of empty and homogenous and theological and philosophical time untouched. Both authors oppose the unifying effect that reduces multiple temporalities to one single time. They seek to demonstrate that the real is constituted by multiple temporalities. By historicizing time and, thus, the very activity of historicizing itself, they break up time into temporalities. In this way, they reformulate the problem of the relationship between the particular and the universal as a problem of time.

Laroui views social reality as historical reality, that is, as being represented according to certain temporalities. In this way, he situates such practices of time in a wider perspective that looks at social uses of time.¹⁶⁶ He provides a critical analysis

of the temporal premises of centrism, essentialism and the culturalization of politics. These all converge in reproducing a certain way of representing time that is addressed in the notions of empty and homogenous and theological and philosophical time, respectively. Laroui interprets them as forms and effects of the creation of cultural memory and traditions. Representing modernity, Enlightenment, Islam or nations as closed cultural units or containers within empty and homogenous time can then be seen as the effect of a process of tradition that naturalizes time. The process of naturalizing time leads, in his view, to what could be called a temporal fallacy. One temporality of a distinct human activity is taken to be all-encompassing. In this way, this temporality and the history linked to it, lose their limits. They become absolute. In contrast to this, Laroui posits the time of politics. When one assumes this perspective, absolute time is confronted with other temporalities and, thus, relativized. As Giorgio Agamben points out, to change the world means to change the time.¹⁶⁷ The key to this perspective of politics is the breaking up of time into temporalities of distinct human activities and thus the transcending of given epistemological frames.

This discussion demonstrates how they bring into view the temporal presuppositions of periodizations as well as the associated political effects. By situating practices of periodization within wider practices of time, Laroui's perspective on methodology defies the seemingly stable distinction of neutral and political uses of periodizations. From this vantage point, periodizations cannot be considered as either solely heuristic or political. What his analyses show is that method is linked to the symbolic production of the political by virtue of its constitutive part in making visible certain histories and not others, and thus by defining what is real.

Insofar as academic historians write within the confines of what Chakrabarty calls »History 1« – the time of modern History with a capital H that is according to Chakrabarty and Laroui inscribed into modern institutions such as the scientific system – they take part in these practices of time. In this sense, their texts are part of the symbolic production of the political. This is different than saying that historiography of this kind is too political. It is to say, rather, that method has an epistemological dimension that is simply political.

¹⁶⁵ Thus, his perspective is thoroughly relational. Cf. for a similar *Denkfigur* Niklas Luhmann, »Dekonstruktion als Beobachtung zweiter Ordnung«, in *Differenzen. Systemtheorie zwischen Dekonstruktion und Konstruktivismus*, ed. Henk de Berg and Matthias Prangel (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 1995).

¹⁶⁶ Al-'Arwī et al., »Al-taḥdīṭ wa-l-dīmūqrāṭīya«, 9. In this sense, Laroui considers all history historiography: Abdelahad Sebtī, »Variations marocaines autour du moment colonial«, in *Les usages politiques du passé*, ed. François Hartog and Jacques Revel (Paris: 2001), 188. Cf. Olaf Breidbach, *Radikale Historisierung. Kulturelle Selbstversicherung im Postdarwinismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2011), 52.

¹⁶⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Kindheit und Geschichte. Zerstörung und Erfahrung und Ursprung der Geschichte*. Aus dem Italienischen von Davide Giuriato (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), 131.

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